Amendment to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (currently amended): A method for providing a persistent connection between a client and a real server, the method comprising:

receiving at a local director a request originating from a first client for connection to a virtual server implemented on the local director, the local director in communication with two or more real servers;

identifying a natural class of an IP address of said first client;

determining if the local director has received and sent out connection requests from said first client or any client having the same natural class as said first client by searching a table stored on the local director and identifying previous connections created between the local director and said two or more real servers;

if the local director has received and sent out a connection request to one of said real servers from said first client or any client having the same natural class as said first client, selecting the same real server for connection with said first client;

if the local director has not received and sent out a connection request to one of said real servers from said first client or any client having the same natural class as said first client, selecting one of said real servers based on load balancing; and

~~selecting a real server associated with the virtual server for connection with the client based only on a natural class of an IP address of a device sending the request; and~~

forwarding to the selected real server transmissions originating from ~~the~~ said first client.

Claim 2 (original): The method of claim 1 wherein selecting a real server comprises selecting the same real server for all clients having the same natural class subnet.

Claim 3 (original): The method of claim 1 wherein receiving a request comprises receiving a request from a firewall and wherein the IP address of the device is the IP address of the firewall.

Claim 4 (original): The method of claim 1 wherein the request is an HTTP request.

Claim 5 (canceled).

Claim 6 (currently amended): A computer program product for providing a persistent connection between a client and a server, the product comprising:
code that receives a request at a local director originating from a first client for connection to a virtual server implemented on the local director, the local director in communication with two or more real servers;
code that identifies a natural class of an IP address of said first client;
code that determines if the local director has received and sent out connection requests from said first client or any client having the same natural class as said first client by searching a table stored on the local director and identifying previous connections created between the local director and said two or more real servers;
if the local director has received and sent out a connection request to one of said real servers from said first client or any client having the same natural class as said first client, code that selects the same real server for connection with said first client;
code that selects one of said real servers based on load balancing if the local director has not received and sent out a connection request to one of said real

servers from said first client or any client having the same natural class as said first client; and

~~code that selects a real server associated with the virtual server for connection with the client based only on a natural class of an IP address of a device sending the request;~~

code that forwards to the selected real server transmission originating from ~~the~~ said first client; and

a computer-readable storage medium for storing the codes.

Claim 7 (currently amended): The computer program product of claim 6 wherein the computer-readable medium is selected from a ~~the~~ group consisting of CD-ROM, floppy disk, tape, flash memory, system memory, hard drive, and data signal embodied in a carrier wave.

Claim 8 (original): The computer program product of claim 6 wherein the code that selects a real server comprises code that selects the same real server for all clients having the same natural class subnet.

Claim 9 (original): The computer program product of claim 6 wherein the code that receives a request comprises code that receives a request from a firewall and wherein the IP address of the device is the IP address of the firewall.

Claim 10 (canceled).

Claim 11 (canceled).

Claim 12 (canceled).

Claim 13 (canceled).

Claim 14 (canceled).

Claim 15 (canceled).

Claim 16 (currently amended): The system of claim 23 16 wherein means for selecting a real sever for connecting with the client comprises selecting the same real server for requests received from IP addresses having the same natural class subnet.

Claim 17 (canceled)

Claim 18 (new): The method of claim 1 further comprising updating said table each time a connection is made between the local director and said two or more real servers with a new natural class.

Claim 19 (new): The method of claim 1 wherein identifying a natural class comprises identifying a subnet mask and wherein the selection of the real server is based on the identified subnet mask.

Claim 20 (new): The method of claim 1 further comprising updating entries in said local director table at predefined intervals.

Claim 21 (new): The method of claim 20 wherein said predefined intervals correspond to a time period that a sticky connection is to last.

Claim 22 (new): The method of claim 1 further comprising clearing all entries in said local director table for a specified natural class if a sticky connection option is turned off for said specified natural class.

Claim 23 (new): A system for providing a persistent connection between a client and a real server, the method comprising:

means for receiving at a local director a request originating from a first client for connection to a virtual server implemented on the local director, the local director in communication with two or more real servers;

means for identifying a natural class of an IP address of said first client;

means for determining if the local director has received and sent out connection requests from said first client or any client having the same natural class as said first client by searching a table stored on the local director and identifying previous connections created between the local director and said two or more real servers;

if the local director has received and sent out a connection request to one of said real servers from said first client or any client having the same natural class as said first client, selecting the same real server for connection with said first client;

if the local director has not received and sent out a connection request to one of said real servers from said first client or any client having the same natural class as said first client, selecting one of said real servers based on load balancing; and

means for forwarding to the selected real server transmissions originating from said first client.